

Unit 4, Lesson 32: In Corinth and Ephesus

Memory Verse: God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. (Acts 19:11, 12)

From Athens Paul went west to Corinth. There he met fellow tent makers Aquila and Priscilla. They had recently arrived there when Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul stayed and worked with them until Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. When they came, Paul devoted himself entirely to preaching.

As usual he preached first to the Jews. But they became abusive toward him, so he started preaching next door to the synagogue at the house of Titius Justus. Paul stayed there for a year and a half, having heard in a vision that no one would attack and harm him. At one point some Jews took Paul to court, claiming that he was teaching people to worship God in a way that was against the law.

The proconsul, Gallio, threw the case out of court saying he was not going to judge matters of the Jews' own law. Those who had brought Paul to court were so upset they beat the synagogue ruler, Sosthenes, in front of the court. Gallio showed no concern over this.

Eventually Paul left Corinth and started back to Syria and Antioch. He arrived at Ephesus, where Paul went into the synagogue and spoke. They asked him to stay, but he declined, promising to return if it was God's will. He then returned to Antioch and spent "some" time there. Then he returned to the territory of his first journey and strengthened the brothers in that region.

Meanwhile a Jew name Apollos showed up in Ephesus. He was teaching the people about Jesus, even though he knew only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila heard him, invited him to their home, and taught him more about Jesus. After this Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the region of Greece not called Macedonia, and the brothers encouraged him. He turned out to be a big help, because he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate.

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul returned to Ephesus. He found there some disciples who were apparently at the same level of knowledge as Apollos before he met Aquila and Priscilla. Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. They responded that they hadn't even heard that there was a Holy Spirit. They had received John's baptism. They now agreed to be rebaptized and the Holy Spirit came on them with power.

Paul went back to the synagogue in Ephesus, speaking boldly there for three months. Some of the Jews became obstinate and publicly maligned Paul and his teaching (which Luke again calls "the Way"). So Paul left them and began to teach in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. He was able to continue this work for two years, so that people throughout the region around Ephesus all had a chance to hear Paul's word. The Holy Spirit worked in power through Paul, as we see in the memory verse for this lesson.

This manifestation of power led some Jews to attempt to replicate the signs. Among these were seven sons of a Jewish chief priest, named Sceva. They encountered a demon-possessed man and said, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." (Acts 19:13)

The man replied, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" (verse 15). He then jumped on them and gave them such a beating that they fled naked and bleeding. This event brought even more

attention to the work Paul was doing, and more people believed as a result. A little later Paul made the decision to leave Ephesus for Jerusalem and, eventually, Rome.

Before he left, however, another major event took place. Paul's teaching of an unseen creator God as the one and only true God threatened the livelihood of a particular group. Ephesus was the center of the worship of Artemis, a female deity. A group of silversmiths made a lot of money selling statues of this false god and they worried about a loss of trade. Their leader, Demetrius, stirred them up:

“...[Y]ou see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.” (Acts 19:26, 27)

The men began chanting “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.” This uproar moved to the theater, believed to be the largest such structure built by the Greeks. Paul wanted to appear before this crowd, but the other believers wouldn't let him. It took a city official to quell this unruly group.

“Men of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash.... As it is we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.” (Acts 19:35, 36, 40)

His words quieted the crowd and they all left the theater quietly. Paul then left Ephesus for Macedonia where he strengthened the believers he had won in earlier visits. He made it eventually to Philippi. He had planned to sail to Syria from there, but a plot by some Jews led him to return through Macedonia. On the way he spent seven days at Troas [Troy], which is north of Ephesus.

The believers met to hear Paul the night before he left, and Paul spoke until midnight. That's when a young man fell asleep in a window on the third floor. He fell out and was killed. Paul went down and put his arms around the corpse. He then said, “Don't be alarmed, He's alive!” (Acts 20:10) He went back upstairs and continued to talk until daybreak.

Paul set a goal of reaching Jerusalem by Pentecost, and thus didn't want to spend time in the province of Asia. So he sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. The meeting was emotional because Paul told them he would never see them again.

Possible thought papers:

1. Imagine you are Apollos before he met Aquila and Priscilla. Write what you think he might have said about Jesus, recalling that he knew only the baptism of John.
2. Very little is left of Ephesus. If you have access to Google Earth, find Aydin in southwest Turkey. Go nearly due east to the coast. You will find some resorts north of Kusadasi, and you can also find a ruin which is probably what's left of the temple of Artemis. How could such a great city virtually vanish?
3. Read Demetrius' speech. Do Christians sometimes talk like that? Is that a problem?